

For Home

by Eienvine

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Summary: "Our parents' war is about to become ours." It was many months before he understood what she'd meant by that.

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I called this a romance and it is, but it's also largely a character study about Astrid. I think she's an interesting character, and this is how I see her.

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Our parents' war is about to become ours.

It was many months before he understood what she'd meant by that. In retrospect he realized it was odd that he'd failed to really understand this major aspect of her personality, but the fact was that in many ways she was an enigma to him, even after becoming his girlfriend—a title she'd casually used one day to his immense relief, as he was fairly sure he would never have worked up the courage to ask her what they were to each other. She had no problems expressing anger but played her more tender feelings a little closer to the chest, and that was fine by him; it was enough that this beautiful, amazing girl seemed to enjoy kissing him, and he tried very hard not to annoy her with stupid questions and make her change her mind about that.

But one day he had a question that he couldn't help asking.

"Do I miss fighting dragons?" she repeated, surprised.

"Yeah," he responded, looking up from the bellows he was kneading. "You know, the excitement and the glory and all that."

"Do _you _miss fighting dragons?"

"What? No, of course not."

"Then why?"

"I heard some of the older folks talking the other day," he shrugged. "A few of them said they missed the excitement of it. They missed coming home and bragging about how many dragons they killed."

"Vikings," she said with mixed fondness and frustration. "Hiccup, that was a terrible time in our lives. People died all the time. We never had enough food because the dragons stole it all. We had to rebuild our houses every year. Of course I don't miss it. And the people who do—" "I think that if we really gave them the choice of going back to that time, nobody would want to, not really. Glory in battle is great and everything, but it's so much nicer not to sleep with one eye open." She settled back, getting more comfortable in her perch on his workbench, but then her face changed and she leaned forward. "Did you really think there was a chance I was going to say yes, that I missed it?"

"No," he said quickly, then added honestly, "maybe. I know you love riding the dragons now. But you always seemed so into our dragon fighting training. You took it more seriously than any of the rest of us. I always figured you were going to be a great dragon killer—that you _wanted _to be a great dragon killer. The kind they write songs about. I mean, that's all that most Vikings really want."

She opened her mouth as though to object, but then subsided into thought, fiddling absentmindedly with one of Gobber's awls. "All right, I guess I might have seemed that way," she conceded. "But that was never what I wanted." She paused. "Do you remember what I said to you on that first day of training?"

The truth was, he remembered every single thing she'd ever said to him. But he wasn't sure which thing she meant, and he didn't want to sound like a stalker, so he shrugged.

"I cared about dragon training because I knew that in a few years, our parents' war would become our war." She clearly thought that was enough explanation, but then, seeing he didn't quite understand, she put her hand to her mouth, deep in thought. After a long moment, in which the only sound was the air rushing in and out of the bellows, she pressed on. "Do you remember when my dad was almost killed in that raid?"

He did remember. They'd been nine years old, and she'd been so somber, trying so hard to hide her fear and sorrow, that he'd found himself suddenly desperate, with his childlike sincerity, to comfort her. That was when Astrid Hofferson first stopped being just another kid in the village to him and started being something much more.

"We thought he was going to die," she said, eyes on the ground. "And I was the oldest and I knew I'd have to help my mom run the house and tend the garden and herd the sheep or we'd all starve. And it made me understand that it only took one dragon attack to make a nine-year-old into an adult." And then, as though trying to defuse the suddenly emotional atmosphere in the smithy, she laughed at

nothing and pressed on more quickly. "And it made me understand that we're going to be the adults in Berk one day." She pointed at him for emphasis. "You and I, Hiccup, and Snotlout and Fishlegs and the twins and the Sorensen girls and everyone else our age—we're going to be the ones in charge of the village, of making sure that we store enough food for the winter and protecting against invaders and building houses and keeping everyone safe."

She shrugged. "I enjoy fighting, I really do. And I'm good at it. But everything I've done has been to prepare to protect Berk. I love Berk, and I intend to stay here until I die. And that requires knowing how to sow seeds and mend fences, but it also means knowing how to swing a sword, and for a long time it meant knowing how to fight dragons. So that's why I learned."

And then a smile crossed her face. "But now we have one less thing to worry about, thanks to you."

"I aim to please" came the soft response.

Her grin widened and she hopped off the bench. "I'd better go; I promised Ma I'd help her with the washing." She crossed to where he stood and kissed him quickly. "Thanks for saving us from the dragons, Hiccup."

"Any time, Astrid," he responded faintly, and watched her disappear through the smithy door. That was not at all the answer he'd been expecting, and he wondered how many more times Astrid was going to surprise him with her passion and her depth and her strength of character. It turned out that all along they'd had the same goal: to help their village. He did it with his brains, and she did it with her brawn, but in the end their intentions were the same.

A hammer clanked in the corner and as a hulking figure stepped out of the shadows, Hiccup realized Gobber had heard the whole conversation. "That's quite a girl," he said, nodding at the door where Astrid had exited. "Steady, dependable, loyal."

"Yeah," Hiccup said, his eyes drifting back to the door.

"She'll grow into a fine woman. Any man would be lucky to have her," Gobber added, his voice a shade too innocent. "Cares a lot about Berk, too. Come to think of it, she'd be an excellent wife for a chief someday."

"Yeah," Hiccup repeated, and he founded himself smiling. "Yeah, she would."

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Reviews are welcome! I may continue this if inspiration strikes and I'm not too riddled with guilt over all the other things I ought to be doing with my time. :)

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file.